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Soil Sampling to begin at Watson Park

City engaged with community to plan new park

San José – Field work to determine the exact location of an old dump site beneath Watson Park near downtown San Jose will begin next Monday and continue for up to three weeks, according to the City’s Public Works Director Katy Allen. An analysis of the field work results, which will be finalized next summer, will also determine the kinds and amounts of contaminants in the soil so that a clean-up plan can be undertaken and the park restored.

The City received approval to begin soil sampling and analysis from the California State Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) last week. DTSC is the lead regulatory agency overseeing the work plan to be undertaken by the City.

“While the full study is not expected to be completed and approved by DTSC until August we expect preliminary information in April,” Allen said, “At that time we should know whether 22nd and East Jackson streets mark the southwesterly boundary for the former dump site.”

“We are working closely with residents along that street to keep them informed,” she added.

Watson Park is located at the intersection of North 22nd and East Jackson streets. Evidence of its former use as a dump and incinerator site in the 1930s was found in 2004 during excavation for a skatepark.

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Vice Mayor Cindy Chavez, who represents the downtown district, said “Watson park is sorely missed by the community and I am excited to initiate this first step in bringing it back. We must fulfill our obligation to create a healthy, clean community asset as quickly as possible.”

Grid Pattern for Sampling

To conduct the soil sampling, crews will be following a grid pattern based on 200-foot squares. At each of the intersecting points on the grid, a core sample will be extracted and sent to a lab for chemical analysis. Three areas closest to the school and residents have been scheduled for early testing. In addition to the Empire Gardens Elementary School campus and adjacent playground, testing will occur along both sides of 22nd Street between Empire and Jackson, and along both sides of Jackson east of 22nd Street.

Equipment involved in the sampling will range from hand-held trowels to backhoes to a specially-designed machine called a Geoprobe® that taps and then pushes a probe into the ground to extract a core sample. The probe will be pushed up to 25 feet deep to reach “native” soil – soil that is below any burn ash residue that may be encountered.

Under the sampling protocol established by DTSC, all samples will be tested for lead, and some of the samples will also be tested for a range of other metals, organic compounds, and other contaminants.

Park Restoration

The City has set aside a \$2 million reserve for cleaning up and restoring the park, in addition to \$800,000 for environmental studies to be performed by consultants. Grants to reimburse the City for some of these costs will be sought from the appropriate resources agencies. An advisory committee of neighborhood residents has been formed to provide input to the City during the parks planning process, as well as to assist in involving and informing the neighborhood during the environmental studies and clean-up effort.

For More Information: The next community meeting is set for March 13 at 6:30 pm at the Upper Watson Community Center Annex on north 22nd Street. Copies of the work plan (officially called “Work Plan for Preliminary Waste Characterization Study, Former Watson Park Burn Site, San Jose, California”) are available at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library (Reference Desk), Empire Gardens Elementary School, and Northside Community Center. For meeting notices, minutes and other information, visit <http://www.sanjoseca.gov/prns/watsonpark/WatsonReports.asp>.

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